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Globalisation and Punjabi Identity: Resistance, Relocation and Reinvention (Yet Again!)

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Punjabiya or Punjabi identity evokes simultaneous contradictory images of a splintered identity, yet a potentially powerful economic, political and cultural force. This paper attempts to capture different aspects of this contradictory nature by situating the conflicting pulls on Punjabi identity in the context of the ongoing process of globalisation of economy, politics and culture. One aspect of globalisation that is particularly taken into account is the role of the Punjabi diaspora in giving impetus both to the powerful imagining of a unified Punjabi identity and to many divisions in the global Punjabi community. Methodologically, the paper attempts to fuse mapping the historical lineages of Punjabi identity with an analytical interrogation of the idea of Punjabiya or Punjabi identity. It concludes by outlining the potential for the emergence of a stronger Punjabi identity in spite of fissures in that identity.

Introduction

When thinking and writing about Punjabi identity, it seems we feel compelled immediately to mention one or other of those accompanying words whose purpose seems to be to qualify and problematise the subject of Punjabi identity. These accompanying words could be: examine, interrogate and explore.¹ Though all of these words connote some degree of hesitation, each signifies a different nuance of that hesitation. If interrogation suggests some kind of scepticism and examination hints at a neutral stance, exploration certainly has a developmental and optimistic ring about it. Behind different shades of scepticism and optimism lie not only the attempts at objective unwrapping of the limitations and potentialities of Punjabi identity but also the political projects aimed at undoing and making it.

The geographic location and the historical making of Punjab have contributed to the vicissitudes of Punjabi identity. The geographic location of Punjab as the gateway to India for traders, invaders and conquerors meant that resistance, relocation and reinvention would all play their part in constantly moulding and remoulding Punjabi identity. The region was repeatedly subjected to annexation, partition and reorganisation. For one significant period in its historical evolution, Punjab under Maharaja Ranjit Singh in the early half of the nineteenth century had the characteristics of an imperial power annexing and subordinating other regions (Singh and Rai, 2009). Along with that, Punjabis have been settling abroad in large numbers since the late

nineteenth century and form one of the most dynamic diasporas. Punjabi identity therefore alternated between fragmentation and fusion, and became extremely complex and multilayered long before the onset of the more recent phase of globalisation. Globality is thus, in a sense, a *déjà vu* for Punjabis. Yet the scale is different. So is the scope.

This paper seeks to map the implications of globality for Punjabis – be they Indian, Pakistani, diasporic or a global amalgamation of all three – insofar as it induces or imposes further fragmentation or fusion. In the process, the paper attempts to answer two questions: could globality make Punjabis reinterpret their bitter-sweet past, and could it shape contemporary aspirations of Punjabis in a way which is more fused and less fragmented? I am using the words globalisation and globality as interchangeable because I recognise that although there might not be a substantial difference between them, except the nuance that tends to suggest globalisation as a process and globality as an effect or consequence, this difference might be useful to keep in mind for exploring the complexities of Punjabi identity (see Brar and Mukherjee, 2012 for a more detailed discussion on globalisation and globality).

It symbolises the contradictory and paradoxical nature of Punjabi identity that it remains a splintered entity and yet powerful idea and, perhaps, even a political and economic force. The idea and reality of three Punjabs – Indian Punjab, Pakistani Punjab and diasporic Punjab – signals immediately the powerful currents of globality implicated in Punjabi identity.²

This paper will attempt to fuse together two different but inter-related aspects of Punjabi identity – its historical tribulations and its contemporary aspirations. It first takes up an historical overview of the upswings and downswings in the evolution of Punjabi identity and then analyses the contemporary challenges and opportunities globality poses to it. Applying the method of fusing the historical and contemporary aspects, references are made to current developments while discussing the historical dimensions and, conversely, history is brought into play while discussing more recent developments.

Lineages of Punjabi identity: cycles of fusion and fragmentation

Any national identity has several aspects that go into its formation. It could be the economic life cycle that sustains and reproduces the community, and through that imparts a unifying character to the community's mode of living. It could be the emergence of a common language as the highest form of communication between the members of the community. It could be its cultural way of life and forms of articulation of leisure consumption – music, songs, dances and humour. It could be the day-to-day living: cooking and eating food, daily rituals of cleanliness and conceptions of sexual activity. It could be birth, marriage and death ceremonies. It could be the modes of aesthetic imagination and articulation – embroidery, painting, sculpture and jewellery, etc. It could be patterns of social organization – egalitarian or hierarchical relations between men and women, and between young and old.³

It could be conceptions of respect, honour and humiliation. It could be forms of showing love, affection, solidarity, betrayal, revenge and hatred. It could be conceptions of the relationship between human beings, nature and God. This list can be expanded. If we were to attempt to do so, one thing which, I think, would certainly deserve an important place would be the experience and memory of living as a political community, that is, one having a sovereign state of its own.⁴

The suggestion that there are unifying aspects of living together that constitute a community and impart in it an identity is not meant to suggest that there are no internal conflicts in the community.⁵ However, in spite of a variety of possible internal conflicts and contestations, what constitutes a distinctive community is the presence of some over-arching unifying aspects. A broad view of the historical evolution of Punjabi people would suggest that they share a large number of the features mentioned above and, on that basis, there are solid material and moral grounds to argue the case for a unifying and common Punjabi identity. However, it is necessary to recognise the counter-acting tendencies working against the common Punjabi identity in order to fully grasp the potentialities and limitations of repeated attempts at reinvention of Punjabi identity. Three aspects of Punjabi life – religion, language and script – can justifiably be said to have played the most critical role in shaping the contestation over Punjabi identity.⁶ The emergence of the Sikh faith in the fifteenth century and its subsequent evolution have decisively shaped the modes of influence of religion, language and script on the articulation of Punjabi identity. Khushwant Singh (1999) has interpreted the rise of Punjabi language and Sikh religion as an expression of the emergence of a distinctive Punjabi identity out of the interaction between a large variety of linguistic and racial groups who came to Punjab, settled here and mixed with the local people. He writes:

The Punjab, being the main gateway into India, was fated to be the perpetual field of battle and the first home of all the conquerors. Few invaders, if any, brought wives with them, and most of those who settled in their conquered domains acquired local women. Thus the blood of many conquering races came to mingle, and many alien languages – Arabic, Persian, Pushto, and Turkish – came to be spoken in the land. Thus, too, was the animism of the aboriginal subjected to the Vedantic, Jain, and Buddhist religions of the Aryans, and to the Islamic faith of the Arabs, Turks, Mongols, Persians, and Afghans. Out of this mixture of blood and speech were born the Punjabi people and their language. *There also grew a sense of expectancy that out of the many faiths of their ancestors would be born a new faith for the people of the Punjab.*

By the end of the 15th century, the different races that had come together in the Punjab had lost the nostalgic memories of the lands of their birth and begun to develop an attachment to the land of their adoption. *The chief factor in the growth of Punjabi*

consciousness was the evolution of one common tongue from a babel of languages.

Although the Punjabis were sharply divided into Muslims and Hindus, attempts had been made to bring about a rapprochement between the two faiths and a certain desire to live and let live had grown among the people. *It was left to Guru Nanak and his nine successors to harness the spirit of tolerance and give it a positive content in the shape of Punjabi nationalism.* (pp. 13-14, italics added)

Grewal (1999) refers to an earlier period in Punjabi history to suggest the emergence of a distinctive Punjabi culture out of interaction between a diverse range of racial, linguistic and religious groups:

... during the first half of the first millennium before Christ, new tribes poured into the Saptasindhu [seven rivers], gradually obliging the bearers of the Vedic culture to move eastwards, into the Kurukshetra region first and then into the Jamuna-Ganges Doab and the upper Ganges plains. With their rather „puritanical“ values they began to look upon the people of the „Punjab“ as outside the pale of their culture. Among the peculiarities of the „Punjabis“, it is mentioned that they traded in wool and in horses; they took to sea-voyages; they loved fighting; they ate garlic and onion and they ate the flesh of fowls, sheep, donkeys, pigs, camels and cows; they drank alcohol and their women sang and danced with them in an inebriate state. The tempo of social change was reinforced by the advent of the Greeks, Parthians, Shakas and the Kushanas. Indeed, the Kushana empire became the melting pot of Iranian, Chinese, Roman and Indian cultures, and almost every aspect of life and culture was „revolutionised“. The philosophy of Mahayana Buddhism was now expounded in languages other than Sanskrit. Imbibing, assimilating and synthesising the various cultural trends of Asia, the people of the region [Punjab] developed an elastic and resilient frame of mind. (pp. 43-44)

It is reasonable to argue that the emergence of a distinctive Punjabi culture, Punjabi language and a Punjabi religion are different milestones in the evolution of a distinctive Punjabi identity. Sikhism as a distinctive Punjabi religion (Ballard 1999) introduced Gurmukhi as a script of the Punjabi language during the period of Guru Angad (1504-52), the immediate successor of Guru Nanak (1469-1539), the founder of the Sikh faith. This raised the status of Punjabi language written in Gurmukhi script to a sacred language in opposition to the older sacred languages of Sanskrit and Arabic (Shackle 2003). Geographical location, economic way of life, cultural characteristics, the development of Punjabi language and its own script (Brandt 2012) and the emergence of a distinctive Punjabi religion all contributed in diverse ways to

the formation of a Punjabi identity which made the people of the Punjab region stand out in a distinctive way from the rest of India.⁷

The rise and decline of the sovereign Punjabi state

The emergence of the sovereign state of Punjab in 1799 under Maharaja Ranjit Singh was a moment of crowning glory in the evolution of a distinctive Punjabi identity. It appeared to be a teleological culmination of a distinctive national identity eventually achieving a sovereign state of its own. Punjab existed as a sovereign state for fifty years (1799-1849) before it was annexed by the British in 1849 and merged with the rest of India under one unified imperial rule. The fact that the annexation of Punjab was accomplished by the British through the Bengal Army, whose soldiers came predominantly from North India, created a permanent fault-line in relations between Punjabis, especially Sikhs, and the „Hindustanis“ from North India whom the Punjabis called Purabias or *kala*. This fault-line became further entrenched when the Punjabi Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus took revenge against the Purabias in the 1857 uprising by siding with the British (Chatterjee, 2007; Dalrymple, 2006; and Singh 2007).

Colonial conquest, the early phase of globalisation and splintering of Punjabi identity

If with the emergence of the sovereign Punjabi state in 1799 the composite Punjabi identity had reached its peak, the disintegration of this state in 1849 initiated the process of decline and splintering of Punjabi identity. Punjab was thrown into the vortex of the early phase of globalisation through the British conquest of Punjab in 1849. Punjabi identity faced the toughest ever challenge and threat to its solidity, coherence and purpose. Not only had the Punjabi nation lost its own sovereign state, which was its protector, patron and promoter, it also experienced heightened and painful dislocation with the economic, political and cultural onslaught of the most powerful imperialist state of the time. Instead of offering any combined resistance to the expanding military, economic and cultural power of the colonial state, the defeated, humiliated and demoralised Punjabis found themselves scrambling for minor economic crumbs and concessions. The Punjabi Muslims and Sikhs were incorporated in large numbers into the imperialist army and Punjabi Hindus into the civil service and trading opportunities offered by the colonial administration and economy (Ali, 1989; Talbot, 1991; Mazumdar, 2003, Yong 2005). The existing occupational divisions in Punjabi society along religious lines became further reinforced and magnified by this colonial management of Punjabi economic needs, compulsions and aspirations. These coterminous divisions were to play a negative corrosive role in later attempts to forge a composite Punjabi identity during both the colonial and post-colonial eras. Punjabi Muslims and Punjabi Sikhs became more entrenched in the agrarian economy and Punjabi Hindus into the service sector. The development of the

Canal Colonies, one of the most ambitious politico-economic development projects undertaken by the colonial rulers in Punjab, offered tempting opportunities to peasants, soldiers, traders and professionals. The majority of the peasants and soldiers were Muslims and Sikhs, and the majority of the traders and professionals were Hindus (Ali, 1989; Omissi, 1994; Mukherjee, 2005; Singh, 2008a). The lure of careers and economic gains in the expanding imperial economy left Punjabi identity dislocated, disoriented and disunited. The Punjabi nation celebrated in the lyrical poetry of Shah Mohammed for its brave resistance during the Anglo-Punjab Wars of the 1840s against British expansionism (D. Singh, 1999) now experienced, just a decade later, a negation of its past glory. The project of a composite Punjabi identity was dead. There were no signs of rediscovery, recovery and reinvention, for the time being at least. Sporadic and isolated attempts at resistance, even armed resistance, such as by the legendary Kukas, were crushed ruthlessly. The conquering British rulers dealt very harshly with such defiant sections of the Punjabi community while simultaneously showing generosity to those sections which accommodated. The political economy of carrot-and-stick policy was in operation in its classic form, subsequently appropriated by the Indian and Pakistani elites who captured power in the post-colonial nation states.

In the late nineteenth century, Punjab saw two diametrically opposite tendencies concerning Punjabi identity. One saw a three-way religious fragmentation of Punjabi identity – Muslim, Hindu and Sikh – as a result of the emergence of religious reformist movements in the three main religious communities of Punjab in opposition to the spread of Christianity supported by the imperial rulers. The resistance of the three Punjabi religious communities to the cultural-religious onslaught of „imperialism“ in the form of Christianity could, in theory, have been the basis of Punjabi unity but, in practice, it sharpened religious identities and boundaries among the three communities (Oberoi, 1994). It is important to note here the contradictory nature of globalising imperialism by acknowledging its contribution in giving birth to another segment of Punjabi identity which remains almost totally neglected in academic discourse on Punjabi identity. The process of imperial cultural penetration into Punjab gave birth to a fourth religious component of Punjabi identity – Punjabi Christians. The Christian missionaries were pioneers in the establishment of modern printing techniques and facilities in the Punjabi language. Most of Punjabi Christians were converts from the Dalit sections, primarily from Punjabi Hindus but also from Sikhs and Muslims. These Punjabi Christians remain one section of the Punjabi community that is most committed to the promotion of Punjabi language.⁸

The second tendency which was opposed to the fragmentation of Punjabi identity was in the political-economic domain, in the form of the emergence of the Unionist Party in Punjab. This was a class-based political alliance of the peasantry – especially of its elite sections – of the three main religious communities of Punjab. The party tried to invent a third way beyond the demands for India and Pakistan. It toyed with the idea of an independent Punjab. Nazar Tiwana's personal memoir of his father, Khizr Hayat Khan

Tiwana, who was the last premier of the unified Punjab and the leader of the Punjab Unionist Party from 1942 to 1947, provides us a rare glimpse into the world view of this great Punjabi nationalist who opposed Jinnah and the 1947 partition of India from a Punjabi nationalist perspective. As a last ditch effort to save Punjab's partition, he tried to tempt the British into accepting his proposal for carving out Punjab as an independent political entity different from both India and Pakistan but part of the larger British empire. Nazar Tiwana writes: „Towards the end of his tenure of office, he floated the idea that Punjab should become a self-governing dominion within the British Empire. This can be documented from the official records, although the British ignored this proposal because it did not suit their strategic purpose“ (Tiwana, 1999, p. 256).⁹ It appeared for a moment that there was flicker of a chance that the Punjabis could have got back from the British the sovereign Punjabi state the British had annexed in 1849. That would have been true decolonisation for Punjab. However, the events of 1947 compounded the tragedy of Punjab. If in 1849 Punjab had lost its sovereignty, it had at least kept its united territorial entity intact. In 1947, it lost even its united territorial entity. Punjab was partitioned into two – West Punjab becoming a part of Muslim Pakistan and the East Punjab becoming part of Hindu majority, though formally secular, India.¹⁰

Post-colonialism and competitive nationalisms

The emergence of the two nation states of India and Pakistan relocated the two Punjabs in two very different situations. The Pakistan Punjab became politically dominant in Pakistan but at the cost of surrendering regional Punjabi identity (Samad, 1995). Indian Punjab, a relatively small state in the Indian federation, saw a vigorous twenty-year battle for the creation of a Punjabi speaking state, but remained, politically, a marginal state in the political power dynamics of the Indian federal state in spite of its impressive success in meeting India's food needs (Singh, 2008). Indian Punjab also witnessed competing claims of secular Indian nationalism, Hindu nationalism, Sikh nationalism and Marxist internationalism relate to each other and to Punjabi identity in a range of contradictory forms (P. Singh, 1997 and 2002). The creation of a Punjabi speaking state on November 1, 1966 was a major milestone in the strengthening of linguistically oriented Punjabi identity. This was the first time in its history that the Punjabi language acquired the status of official language of a state – a status it did not have even when, under Ranjit Singh, Punjab was a sovereign state. This great victory of the Punjabi language was marred by the denial of Chandigarh, a Punjabi speaking city, as the sole capital of Punjab due to the Hindu majority character of Chandigarh's population. It was a setback to Punjabi identity due to religious identity being given priority over linguistic identity. The limbo status of Chandigarh is a continuous reminder of a fault-line in the making of Punjabi identity (Singh, 2008).

Diaspora, a higher stage of globalisation and Punjabi identity: new challenges and opportunities

Silently and slowly, another force relating to Punjabi identity which has been emerging is the growth of a Punjabi diaspora (Singh, 2012). The spatial and cultural relocation of Punjabis to the West from the 1960s onwards has opened a new space for articulation of the common dimensions of Punjabi identity. Parallel to and opposed to this articulation of shared Punjabi identity is the phenomenon of a section of the diaspora becoming a major player in articulating sectarian divisions in Punjabi identity (Tatla, 1999). The contradictory voice of this diaspora has acquired special significance in the accelerating process of the globalisation of the world economy and media. The process of globalisation has opened hitherto unknown opportunities for exchange of commodities and ideas and, to a lesser extent, of labour between India and Pakistan, and between India/Pakistan and the rest of the world. The temptations of economic gains from increased trade relations between Indian Punjab and Pakistani Punjab have ignited a series of reinventions of common Punjabi heritage and identity. This process, however, is uneven. While cultural exchanges based on shared culture and literature are leading the way, progress on the economic front is being hampered by geo-political considerations. Due to increased cross-border cultural exchanges, the global Punjabi diaspora's imagination has suddenly been fired by the realisation of their power as possible catalysts in the making of a global Punjabi identity. The organising of world Punjabi conferences has become their theatre of action for the project of global Punjabi identity. New technological possibilities of instant translation between different scripts of Punjabi language have removed many barriers of communication and national borders. Magazines and websites publishing Punjabi literature simultaneously in different scripts are springing up. Pan-Punjabi organizations such as the Academy of the Punjab in North America (APNA <http://www.apnaorg.com/>) are playing a key role in forging common cultural ties of Punjabiyat. These attempted reinventions of common Punjabi identities unsettle many sensibilities of Indian nationalism and Pakistani nationalism. The projected scenarios of global Punjabi identity and the voices of attempted reinventions of common Punjabi identity are viewed nervously by Indian and Pakistani nationalists as potential critiques of the legitimacy of these two nation states. Fear that globalisation weakens the nation state accentuates the nervousness of the nation states of India and Pakistan. Punjabi nationalists, on the other hand, view with glee the benefits that might accrue to them from the tendency of globalisation to weaken the nation state. Both the nervousness of the Indian and Pakistani nationalists and the glee of the Punjabi nationalists might be overplayed because globalisation is a contradictory and complex process with uncertain outcomes.

The diaspora, like all other social entities under capitalism, is highly differentiated. The over-activity of the intellectual elite of the diaspora in the cause of global Punjabi identity seems to overshadow the mundane day-to-day life of ordinary diasporic existence. Cleavages of religion, caste, language and

script have not disappeared; in some instances they have become stronger than they are in the homeland. For example, there is much more day-to-day contact between Sikhs and the Hindus in Punjab than there is in the West. Similarly, there is much more day-to-day contact between different caste groups in Punjab than there is in the West. In the hectic cycle of day-to-day life, Sunday seems to offer the only time-slot for socialising. The vast majority of Punjabi settlers in the West use almost regularly a part of Sunday's socialising time-slot to visit temples, mosques, gurdwaras and churches. This weekly experience of religious socialising gives them autonomous socio-cultural space but does not contribute to strengthening of cross-religious bonds.

It is the new generations of Punjabis in the diaspora who are experimenting with new modes of living and are attempting to not only transcend the barriers of religion and caste but also forge artistic and social ties with Afro-Caribbean culture, giving birth to the idea and experience of hybrid identities (Bauman and Banerji 1990). Bhangra music in its diverse forms has grown to become the focal point of Punjabi and hybrid identities; it has also spawned new interest in learning Punjabi language in diverse scripts (Sharma et al., 1996; Kaur and Kalra, 1999). The impact of the locational differences in the Punjabi diaspora (e.g. British Punjabi diaspora, North America Punjabi diaspora, East Asian Punjabi diaspora, East Africa diaspora etc.) on the differences in relating to Punjabi identity is a subject for further exploration to understand the complexities of the Punjabi diaspora's relationship to Punjabi identity especially on issues of caste, religion, language and region (for an initial attempt to see the differences regarding caste in the UK and Canada, see Singh, 2012a)

The shared Punjabi identity has received a massive boost from the popular appeal of Punjabi language and culture in cinema and film music. Bollywood has become a site and carrier of celebration of the shared Punjabi culture, with some leading Bollywood producers and directors (such as Yash Chopra) having found something of a formula for success by including Punjabi cultural themes in a film's narrative (Das, 2006). Even the image of the *sardar* has been transformed in this new enterprise of Punjabi celebration: no longer presented as a buffoon, the Singh is now a king, powerful, smart, sexy and glamorous (Singh, 2010). A Bollywood film is considered commercially successful if it runs well in Punjab and in the Punjabi diaspora, while the large market of Pakistani Punjab has further added to the economic attraction of celebrating shared Punjabi culture. Harbhajan Mann has shot to stardom as a lead male actor in many new Punjabi films (Abbi, 2012); while in Pakistan, Punjabi films in the genre of *Maula Jat*, representing the brave and rustic Punjabi farmer, have been a roaring success. Sultan Rahi, the star of many films in this genre, has become the most popular cinema hero in Pakistan, and Punjabi cinema has in recent years eclipsed the previously dominant Urdu cinema (Ayers, 2008).

The emotional appeal of common and shared Punjabi identity has not died down. However, in the globalising word of today, the reinvented global Punjabi identity has to compete with global Hinduism, global Sikhism, global

Islam and global Christianity. In the contest between Punjabi identity and globalised religion whether in India, Pakistan or in the diaspora, the old contest between language and culture on one side and the religion on the other is being replayed. Religion could cannibalise language and culture, but equally powerfully it could be said that people's linguistic affinities and cultural ties are of such enduring strength and intensity that they can overcome the challenge of religious sectarianism. As long as Punjabi language is alive and kicking, there will always be hope for some form of Punjabi identity (Coventry, 2008). Languages do die but Punjabi language has a long history, it has a highly developed literature and is spoken (if not read and written) by many millions of people not only in the Indian and Pakistani Punjab but in almost every continent of the world. Globalisation may create threatening tendencies for Punjabi language but it could equally well spur new interest and new opportunities for the development of not only Punjabi language but also of a diverse range of Punjabi art forms. I would further add that even if one were to argue that globalisation may not create any opportunities but only threats, that does not mean that the future is shaped only by globalisation. *I wish to emphasise this point because it has remained undeveloped in this paper that the power of globalisation has limits.* The history of societies, including linguistic communities, is not shaped only by external forces such as globalisation. It is also shaped by the internal strength and dynamic of societies and linguistic communities.

In the conflict between religion and language I have mentioned above, the role of globalisation is not clear. The scenario of threat and opportunity globalisation creates for language is equally applicable to religion. In the case of Punjabi language, the fact that there exists a Punjabi speaking state (however limited its powers be in India's federal structure) whose *raison d'être* is Punjabi language means no force of globalisation can liquidate this language. I cannot ever imagine that over twenty million inhabitants of Punjab in India will all start speaking English or Hindi if one were to equate the power of America-led globalisation with English and that of Indian hegemony with Hindi. In spite of all the economic temptations of globalisation and the power of Hindi hegemony, the Punjabi language in Indian Punjab is flourishing. The continuous increase in the circulation of Punjabi newspapers is one indicator among many of the vibrant vitality of the Punjabi language.¹¹ Punjabi language has very little, if any, state support in Pakistan but the indications are that this is likely to change in favour of Punjabi in the future (Ayers, 2008). In the Punjabi diaspora, interest in Punjabi language is certainly on the increase even if it is not phenomenal. If the state of Punjabi language suggests a healthy existence, it is a positive sign of the continued strength of Punjabi identity. This is not to suggest that Punjabi language is the most important marker of Punjabi identity. It is possible that a shared Punjabi culture which may be difficult to define but very palpable in lived experience may be the main marker of Punjabi identity. Along with shared Punjabi culture, Punjabi language will remain an important marker of Punjabi identity. So far, there is no strong evidence to suggest that the forces of globalisation have harmed the

growth of Punjabi language and culture though, in future, in relating to globalisation, Punjabi language, culture and identity will have to continuously negotiate with, resist, cooperate, outmanoeuvre and use the contradictory forces of globalisation. For Punjabi identity in the context of globality, relocation and reinvention of itself is necessary not only for survival but also for further consolidation and growth.

Summary and conclusion

Punjabi identity has a long lineage. It has gone through cycles of fusion and fragmentation. It reached its peak with the emergence of a sovereign Punjabi state between 1799 and 1849. The early entry of globalisation in Punjab through the annexation of this sovereign state by the expanding British empire led to splintering of Punjabi identity. Though during the ninety-eight years of British rule in Punjab, there were conflicting tendencies of fragmentation and fusion, the ultimate decline of colonialism ended up in terrible division of Punjab and Punjabi identity. Punjabis renegotiated their identities in Indian Punjab, Pakistan Punjab and in the diaspora. The diasporic experience has raised the prospect of recovery of Punjabi identity as a global Punjabi identity transcending the barriers of nation states. The diaspora itself is a differentiated entity. The intellectual diaspora, the elite sections of the diaspora and the politically progressive sections of the diaspora inspired by socialist internationalism articulate aspirations for global Punjabi identity. The major section of the diaspora continues to rely upon religion as an important mode of organising social life. This has given a fillip to globalised religious visions that undermine Punjabi identity. However, the new generations of the Punjabi diaspora are reinventing Punjabi identity through hybrid music and art forms.

Punjabi language remains an important marker of Punjabi identity. Due to different ideological and cultural hegemonies, the development of Punjabi language remains an uneven phenomenon in India, Pakistan and the diaspora. The encouragement to the development of Punjabi language in Punjab after the creation of the Punjabi speaking state in 1966 is not matched in Pakistan where, in fact, there has been discouragement of the Punjabi language and identity by the Punjabi elites that control state and military power, who view the discouragement of all regional identities, including their own, as conducive to the maintenance of their centralised power structure. Though there is no clear evidence that globalisation, on the whole, has harmed or helped the development of Punjabi language, Punjabi identity needs to constantly renegotiate with the cultural and economic forces unleashed by globalisation. This renegotiation is necessary for continuous renewal, relocation and reinvention if Punjabi identity is to not only survive but also thrive.

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Notes

¹ A book based on papers submitted to the first international conference on Punjabi identity held at Coventry University in 1994 gave prominence to the word „exploration“ in its title *Globalisation and the Region: Explorations in Punjabi Identity* (Singh and Thandi, 1996). The title of the revised edition of this book, *Punjabi Identity in a Global Context* (Singh and Thandi, 1999), seemed to suggest a more confident take on Punjabi identity. When I suggested to my publisher (Oxford University Press) that the original title should be kept for the revised edition, the publishing team came back to me with marketing feedback that suggested that there was a clear preference for Punjabi identity to be in the main title rather than in the subtitle. It appeared to me that the exploratory nature of Punjabi identity suggested in the first attempt (1996) reflected a hesitant approach to the subject while in the second attempt (1999) a more confident view had developed about the subject and the project of Punjabi identity. Since that first attempt in „exploring“ Punjabi identity, the level of globalisation has increased, and the idea of Punjabi identity has certainly acquired more weight and acceptance, though it still provokes contestation from many points of view which may themselves be opposed to each other (see Ahmed, 2007; Jodhka, 1997; P. Singh, 1999, 2010).

² The Punjab Research Group (PRG), an academic group which has been focusing on seminar discussions of ongoing research on Punjab since its launch in 1984, defines three Punjabs in a slightly different way – a historic pre-1947 Punjab, the post-1947 Punjab divided between two nation states of India and Pakistan, and the diasporic Punjab. The Association for Punjab Studies (UK) launched a journal, *International Journal of Punjab Studies*, in 1994 which carried the same categorisation of Punjab. The journal’s blurb stated: “The *International Journal of Punjab Studies* provides international and comparative research on the historical pre-1947 Punjab, the Indian and Pakistani Punjab after 1947, and the Punjabi Diaspora”. The journal, renamed *Journal of Punjab Studies* in 2005 as a collaborative project between the Association for Punjab Studies (UK) and the Centre for Sikh and Punjab Studies, University of California, Santa Barbara (USA), defines Punjab by highlighting its history and geography as a region. Its blurb states, “Centred around the cities of Amritsar and Lahore, the region of Punjab spreads from Delhi in the Southeast to Peshawar in the Northwest, and connects the Indian subcontinent with Central Asia and the Middle East. Beginning with the Indus Valley Civilisation, the region has played a pivotal role in the cultural, economic, and political development of India.” With this geographically focused definition of Punjab as a region in the Indian sub-continent, the journal

thinks of only two Punjabs: “The *Journal of Punjab Studies* is a forum for interdisciplinary and comparative scholarship on the region of Punjab and the Punjabis living overseas.” If we combine all the above different descriptions of Punjab, we come up with four Punjabs – pre-1947 historic Punjab, post-1947 Indian Punjab, post-1947 Pakistani Punjab, and the Punjabi diaspora. In order to capture fully the diversity and unity of Punjabi identity, we can add a fifth dimension – the global Punjabi identity. The global Punjabi identity is more than diasporic Punjabi identity. It is a trans-territorial identity. It includes the diasporic Punjabis but also the Punjabi inhabitants of Indian Punjab, Pakistan Punjab and the Punjabis settled in the other states of India and Pakistan. This last set of Punjabis could be viewed as internal diaspora- people living away from their linguistic homeland but still in a territorial space and a nation state which incorporates their homeland. See the discussion on the idea of Punjabiyat at the PRG website <http://theprg.co.uk/2010/06/03/the-idea-of-punjabiyat-by-pritam-singh/>

³ The caste hierarchy, both as social organisation and as ideological world view, is a unique and specific institution that emerged in the evolution of Hindu civilisation. The institution of caste imparts a distinctive identity to Hinduism. It goes beyond the scope of this paper to examine the possibilities of this institution solidifying, mutating or disintegrating in the future, and the implications of all these possibilities for the distinctive identity of Hinduism. The caste and gender dimensions of Punjabi identity are not discussed in this paper. See Bachu (1999) for integrating gender, migration and globalisation into a consideration of Punjabi migrant women’s identity. See also Dhanda (2009) for the continuing relevance of caste identity in inter-personal relations amongst Punjabi youth and the ways in which dalit response to casteism is being articulated.

⁴ Punjab existed as an independent sovereign state for fifty years (1799 to 1849) before it was annexed by the expanding British empire (Chopra, 1960). During Ranjit Singh’s reign and shortly after annexation, his rule was seen by all Punjabis as a Punjabi state and he is remembered as the „Lion of Punjab“ (Khushwant Singh, 1997). The later splintering of Punjabi identity has resulted in the collective remembrance of Ranjit Singh being a contested terrain. On one hand, he is represented by Sikh nationalists as the realisation of the Sikh dream of statehood and political sovereignty, and, on the other, he is viewed by Punjabi nationalists as a symbol of composite Punjabi identity and is celebrated as a secular Punjabi ruler. Tahir (1999), analysing the work of a Punjabi poet, Qadiryar (b. 1802) who was a contemporary of Ranjit Singh, argues that the poet identified with Ranjit Singh’s kingdom through his *Var* (ballad) that celebrates the military victories of the Sikh warrior Hari Singh Nalwa over the Pathans and Afghans.

⁵ The aspect of an over-arching unity in group identity in spite of internal differences has universal relevance. For example, Isaac Deutscher (1980), the celebrated biographer of Leon Trotsky, wrote that although the Russian

peasantry under Stalinist rule was internally differentiated, yet its unity as a class born out of its socio-economic life in the rural economy was the cause both of its strength of resistance to Stalinist collectivisation and of the severity of the Stalinist terror unleashed against it.

⁶ It would be wrong to prioritise religion and religious differences over all other markers of identity to such an extent that all unifying elements are reduced to the point of denial. Such a prioritisation would amount to essentialising religion and religious differences. For an argument which justifiably highlights the importance of religious differences but, unfortunately, approximates an essentialist view of religious differences and their role in the denial of possibilities of Punjabi identity, see G. Singh (2006). He grounds identity so firmly in the religious domain, at least in the case of Punjabis, that he views any conceptualisation of Punjabi identity that transcends religious boundaries as romantic. Such an essentialist mode of argument is flawed because essentialism is mono-dimensional, reductionist and simplistic. It fails, therefore, to capture the multi-layered, contradictory and complex nature of human existence and experience. Another Punjabi scholar who has devoted considerable energy to the study of Punjab's partition is so overwhelmed by the ferocity of sectarian violence during the 1947 partition that he feels pessimistic about the prospect of unifying Punjabi identity (Ahmed 2012). He expressed his pessimism more strongly in a personal communication with me but then qualified this pessimism by suggesting in an optimistic tone that we Punjabis „have to defeat them [sectarian religious divisions] philosophically and morally and one day who knows the coming generations may be wiser than our previous generation or us" (email September 24, 2012). Ahmed's approach suggests an open-ended future.

⁷ Spate, the famous biographer of the Indian sub-continent, highlighted Punjab's rivers as its distinctive identity markers: "...the Five Rivers – from west to east Jhelum, Chenab, Ravi, Beas and Sutlej – which give the province its name and unite in the southwest to form the Panjnad or Five Streams" (Spate and Learmonth 1972, p. 516). Khushwant Singh points to the overall geographical unity of Punjab imparting to it an identity that was distinct from the neighbouring countries and the rest of India (Khushwant Singh, 1999, p. 3). See also Shackle (2003).

⁸ I found during several of my field visits to Punjab's countryside in the last few years that Punjabi dalits, a substantial section of whom are Christians, are avid readers of Punjabi newspapers. A part of the expanding circulation and economic success of Punjabi newspapers in the Indian Punjab can be certainly attributed to these reading practices of Punjabi Christians. It might be relevant here to mention an interesting aspect of the life of diaspora Punjabi Christians. According to my Punjabi Christian informants, Bedford has the largest and Oxford the second largest component of Punjabi Christians settled in the UK. A teacher employed by Oxford City Council to teach Punjabi language to children who opt for Punjabi as a subject in their secondary education told me

that she had a class of twenty-two students out of whom one was a Sikh, one a Hindu and the remaining twenty were Punjabi Christians. On further probing the matter, I came to the conclusion that the middle class Hindus and Sikhs who come from Punjab to cities like Oxford get relatively easily inducted into the middle class life style here and converse easily in English with their children. The Punjabi Christians, a majority of whom can converse comfortably only in Punjabi with their children, needed their children to learn Punjabi language. These Punjabi Christians successfully pressurised one of the local churches they visit to conduct one of the religious services in Punjabi. The notice board of the East Oxford Community Centre displays in Punjabi along with English the timetable for religious services conducted there. These Punjabi Christians are one of the important components of the readership of Punjabi newspapers, magazines and books published in the UK and Punjab. They have repositioned and relocated themselves as Punjabis and through that relocation have sought to empower themselves. During a field trip to Pakistan Punjab in May 2009, I had the privilege, through Tej Purewal's help, of meeting many Punjabi Christians in Lahore and attending their church services. These Punjabi Christians are one of the strongest practitioners and votaries of Punjabi language in Pakistan.

⁹ Khizr Tiwana kept up his dream of a united Punjab. Nazar Tiwana reports that his father told an informal gathering of friends and family members in London in 1964: „Those of you who do not belong to my generation will live to see Punjabi identity overcome the effects of the religious divide of 1947 and enjoy the fruits of a prosperous and happy Punjab which transcends the limitations of a geographical map” (Tiwana, 1999, p. 252). See also Talbot (1994) and Malik (1995, 1998 and 1999).

¹⁰ For an argument on how the secularism of India is compromised and weakened by an institutionalised Hindu bias, see Singh (2005) on a case study of such a bias in India's constitution. See also Bajpai (2002, 2009/10, 2011) and Chiriyankandath (2002).

¹¹ The Hind Samachar group of newspapers based in Jalandhar is an Arya Samaj institution and the Arya Samaj has a long history of anti-Punjabi language campaigns (Banga, 1999; Deol, 2000). This group has been forced to start a Punjabi daily *Jagbani* in order to cash in on the growing readership for Punjabi newspapers. Similarly the Tribune group of newspapers based in Chandigarh which has been historically indifferent to the rise or decline of Punjabi language, has started a Punjabi daily, *Punjabi Tribune*, to take a share of the expanding market for Punjabi newspapers. Anderson (1991) has particularly emphasised the role of print media in collective community communications and in the construction of national identities.

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